

For our students with anxiety:



What is an anxiety disorder?

Everyone experiences anxiety at some point in his or her life. People become anxious when they face a highly stressful situation like taking a test, going for a job interview or getting married. When one is anxious and under stress, the body reacts; hands become clammy, the heart beats a little faster; one can even feel lightheaded or dizzy; experience shortness of breath; muscle aches and pains, or tremors and shaking. Some people become preoccupied with fear and worry, and the intense feelings of anxiety continue. When someone experiences anxiety such as this but it is more severe, long lasting, and interferes with their activities, relationships or studies, they may have an anxiety disorder.

One in eight youth are impacted by an anxiety disorder. Anxiety can take the form of panic disorder, phobia, post-traumatic stress disorder, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Without treatment an individual's physical, mental and emotional health may be in jeopardy. Anxiety disorders can also lead to alcohol and/or drug abuse, family problems, depression, and in some cases, suicide.

What is obsessive compulsive disorder?

People with obsessive compulsive disorder experience unwanted thoughts that make no sense but nevertheless cause the individual to feel anxious. Irrational thoughts may concern contaminating themselves or others with dirt or germs, or they may be obsessed about their own safety or the safety of a loved one. In response to their obsessive thoughts, individuals may need to think neutralizing thoughts or to perform certain compulsive rituals, including repetitive hand washing or counting. As with phobias, a traumatic event can trigger obsessive thoughts or behavior. People who are described as perfectionists however seem more prone than others to develop obsessions. If untreated, this condition can result in severe impairment in many psychological areas as well as affect relationships and life at school or work.

What are phobias?

A phobia is an irrational and uncontrollable fear of an objects, places or situations. It is unclear how phobias start, but if an individual is prone to excessive anxiety and stress, he or she is more likely to be vulnerable to panic attacks and phobias. People with phobias experience feelings of intense panic when confronted by whatever it is that frightens them and go to considerable lengths to avoid the object or situation. An individual with a phobia may experience the physical feelings of panic when confronted with the feared situation. Types of phobias are:

- **Agoraphobia:** Individuals develop agoraphobia out of the fear of a panic attack occurring in any situation where help is unavailable or escape difficult. People with agoraphobia associate places or feelings as the cause of their panic attacks so they try to avoid the place and/or situation that they think is the cause. People with agoraphobia may confine themselves to their homes, become very worried about their health, abuse alcohol or become suicidal. The rate of attempted suicide for people with agoraphobia is about 20%. Agoraphobia and depression are closely related.
- **Social Phobia:** People with social phobia may have difficulty starting a conversation, asking questions, making friends or joining groups. The anxiety produced by a social phobia can be so intense that it provokes blushing, stammering, sweating, stomach upsets, a racing heart, trembling limbs or trigger a full-scale panic attack. Social phobias are one of the most common psychiatric disorders, which may be associated with other conditions like depression, specific phobias (fear of spiders, heights, water, etc.) and agoraphobia.
- **Specific Phobia:** People with a specific phobia experience anxiety only when confronted with the thing they most fear. Common fears are thunderstorms, heights and certain animals like snakes and spiders. Of all the anxiety disorders, specific phobias are the most responsive to therapy.

What is panic disorder?

On average, 1 out of 3 young adults report having had a panic attack in the last year. During a panic attack, someone may experience sensations such as sweating, nausea, trembling and numbness in the legs or hands, dizziness, hot or cold flashes, tightness or pressure in the chest, hyperventilation, "jelly" legs, or blurred vision can develop. Individuals may even feel like they are going to die of a heart attack or lose control of their body functions. These intense feelings of panic usually do not last for very long. Some people become very nervous and develop a fear of it happening again. If an individual has more than four panic attacks within a month or a panic attack occurs when the individual is not in an anxious or stressful situation, it is probable that the individual has a panic disorder. Individuals who are prone to panic attacks are more likely to be concerned with illness, death or losing control. Panic disorders usually begin before the individual is 20-30 years old.

Other forms of anxiety disorders

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:** PTSD is an anxiety reaction to a real or life-threatening, traumatic event (e.g., a car accident, rape or war). Individuals with PTSD may also suffer from nightmares and insomnia, flashbacks, hypervigilance (always being on alert), irrational outbursts of anger and depression.
- **Generalized Anxiety:** People with generalized anxiety disorder often worry excessively about things, that to others, seem illogical. Their bodies also react to an ongoing state of tension and anxiety. They may experience tightness and pain in their muscles, lack of concentration, shakiness, insomnia, irritability and irritable feelings.

What are the treatments for anxiety disorders and phobias?

There has been a lot of progress in the understanding and diagnosis of the various forms of anxiety disorders. Treatment is specific to the severity of the disorder. The most effective forms of therapy are based on cognitive and behavioral approaches. Individuals may also learn calming techniques and meditative therapy and anti-depressant medication can be prescribed to help their anxiety. In most cases therapy will help the individual get better and lead a productive life.

Where can I get help?

If you or someone you know experiences any of these anxiety disorders, look to the following for help:

- Primary care physicians
- Pediatricians
- Nurse practitioners
- Psychiatrists/psychologists
- Mental Health Care providers
- Social Workers

For More Info

- **Anxiety Disorders Association of America** - www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children
- **Anxiety Panic Attack Resource** - <https://www.healthyplace.com/anxiety-panic/>
- **National Council for Community Behavior Healthcare** - www.thenationalcouncil.org/
- **International OCD Foundation** - www.ocfoundation.org

Helplines

American Psychiatric Association Answer Center- 1-888-35 (PSYCH) 77924

American Psychological Association Public Education Line- 1-800-964-2000

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1-800-273-TALK (8255)